Turpentine and Camphor Industry, State Governments and MP's regarding fast developing crisis taking heavy toll of labour intensive small scale units rendering thousands of workers unemployed;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of action taken/proposed to be taken to provide a package of incentives for sustainable growth?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M.R. JANARTHANAN): (a) and (b) Several representations have been received from trade associations and MP's seeking abolition of import duty on Oleopine resin (OPR). Some states have represented against reduction in the import duty on OPR. Representations have also been received for exempting camphor from excise duty.

(c) The said representations were examined as part of the budget exercise for 1999-2000 and it was decided not to exempt oleopine resin from import duty or exempt camphor from excise duty.

Guns aeized by Customs Authorities

2273. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of guns seized by the Customs authorities since April, 1995 and their disposal;

(b) the Customs sale price of the guns and their market prices category-wise; and

(c) the reasons for fixing so low sale price?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M.R. JANARTHANAN): (a) 132 Nos. of Guns/fire arms (including Pistols, Revolvers, Rifles, Shotguns and Air Guns) are reported to have been seized by the officer of the Customs Department, since April, 1995. During the said period, 173 fire arms/guns (including Pistols, Revolvers and Rifles) have been disposed of.

(b) and (c) The customs are presently selling the weapons, on request and availability, to the Members of Parliament only, for their personal safety and these can not be further disposed of. The sale price of fire arms including guns, which is fixed in accordance with the laid down guidelines, vary with the type, model and category i.e. rifle, revolver, pistols etc. and the customs sale prices range between Rs. 5000/- and Rs. 41,000/-. Import of fire arms are restricted and sale of fire arms—where import permitted—is also prohibited. Open market prices of imported guns are not available and hence it is not possible to comment on the degree of difference between the sale price of customs and actual market prices. The pricing policy is, however, under review.

Controlling Government Expenditure

2274. DR. B.B. DUTTA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the total Central Government expenditure estimated in 1998-99;

(b) what is the percentage increase in total Central Government expenditure in 1998-99 as compared to 1997-98;

(c) whether Government had imposed a 10 percent cut in non-plan expenditure;

(d) whether any cut in plan expenditure was also suggested;

(e) if so, the details thereof; and

(f) the reasons for not controlling Government expenditure?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) In the revised estimates for the year 1998-99, the total Central Government expenditure has been placed at Rs. 2,81,912 crore;

(b) The increase in total Central Government expenditure in 1998-99 (Revised Estimates) as compared to 1997-98 is 21.5%;

(c) To effect economy in non-Plan expenditure, a 10% cut on non-salary secretariat expenditure was imposed;

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Does not arise;

(f) After meeting obligatory and essential payments like Plan expenditure, Interest payments, Defence, Food & Fertiliser subsidy, Internal Security, Pension, Transfers to State Governments in terms of finance Commissions recommendations, etc., the growth of other items of expenditure has been generally restrained.

Call for indefinite strike by United Forum of Bank Unions

2275. SHRI GAYA SINGH:
SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:
SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) consisting of four officers' associations and five workers' Unions has given a call for an indefinite nation wide strike from March 17 to be preceded by a two day strike on February 25 and 26 in support of their demand for a wage hike; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the measures being taken for an amicable settlement of their demands so that the proposed strike is averted?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M.R. JANARTHANAN): (a) and (b) On the call given by United Forum of Bank Unions, the bank employees went on two days strike on February 25th and 26th in support of their demand for wage hike. The Forum had also given a notice for indefinite nation wide strike from March 17, 1999. However, in pursuance of understanding reached on 11.3.99 between Indian Banks' Association and the United Forum of Bank Unions regarding wage settlement, the indefinite strike from March 17, 1999 has been called off.

Effect of lowering of interest rates on investors

2276. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:
SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to refer to answer to Starred Question No. 18 and Unstarred Question No. 63 given in the Rajya Sabha on 23rd February, 1999 and to state:

(a) the number of customers in the National Saving Scheme and National Postal Saving Scheme during the last three years with State-wise details;

(b) whether it is a fact that most of the investors in these schemes are small depositors, especially pensioners and main reason for their investing in the sense of security that these schemes evoke; and

(c) if so, whether the lowering of interest rates will affect them and expose them to the unscrupulous N.B.F.Cs and Mutual Funds whose records are dubious?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) The Circle-wise number of accounts/certificates issued' in respect of s nall savings schems during the last three years are being collected. State-wise details of number of customers are not available.